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Eliminating Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS

First Lady Museveni and Ambassador DeLisi

Presenter: I am honored to speak today with Mrs. Janet Museveni, First Lady of Uganda, and U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, Scott DeLisi. Today, we are speaking about the fight against mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS in Uganda. First Lady, why is eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV so important to the future of Uganda?

First Lady Museveni: Well, let me just say good afternoon to everybody who is listening to us. It is unacceptable for us in Uganda to continue to have the levels of HIV and AIDS going up. And we believe we can stop that if we start with the unborn child, and we will stop that by ensuring that mothers will not ... that they can really stop their children being born with HIV and AIDS by protecting the baby if the mother is already sick, but hopefully, we want to get more mothers to be free of HIV and AIDS themselves.

Presenter: Madam Janet, what should Ugandans do to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV?

First Lady Museveni: First of all, we believe everybody in the country should really take the trouble to test themselves. If a person is negative, they must ensure that they will never catch HIV and AIDS. When you find you are positive, that requires you to accept counseling, and then you go on treatment right away.

If you are married and you are found positive, you must ensure that also your partner must have her or his own test. There are possibilities of two partners having two different results. Those are the ones that are called “discordant couples.” Then both of you should go for counseling, and the one who is positive must accept to go on treatment right away. You can have children who are healthy, who are negative from HIV and AIDS, even when you have one of you already sick.

This is why testing is very, very important. If we can ensure that adults will stop catching HIV and AIDS because they live in faithful relationships when they are married, they abstain from premarital sex, then, in time, we will have the HIV-free generation.

Presenter: Ambassador DeLisi, why is the United States such a strong partner with Uganda in eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV?

Ambassador DeLisi: This campaign to eliminate mother-to-child transmission is incredibly important to our overall goal of creating an AIDS-free generation in Uganda. And we know that the fight against AIDS has many dimensions, but certainly, this effort to protect the lives of children yet to be born has to be one of the most critical things that we can do.

We, as Americans, are committed to Uganda’s future. We are committed to a partnership. We want to see this country continue to grow, to become prosperous, to become strong, and to be healthy. And we know we need to protect both this unborn generation, but also to help those who are currently suffering from HIV/AIDS to deal with the disease, and to live lives of productivity and dignity, even as they manage their disease.

And most importantly, as the First Lady said, it’s to encourage those who are currently HIV-free to remain free. To make responsible choices, to make value-based choices about their lives and about their behaviors that will protect themselves, protect their partners, and protect the nation’s future. And this is what we are committed to, and we are delighted to do this in partnership with the First Lady.

Presenter: And a question to you both, what is your message to the Ugandans listening to this radio program, about our common goal of eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Uganda?

First Lady Museveni: Well lately, we have been trying to involve the fathers in the reproductive cycle of their families. And so we've been trying to make an effort to really mobilize our communities to talk about the involvement of the father and mother, together, to remember that the birth of any baby is the responsibility of two parents. And we believe that if the fathers are involved, beginning with antenatal clinics, going with their wives to attend antenatal clinics, we believe that that way, the mothers will really be motivated, they will fight this battle, and whatever help they must get, they will get it in time so that their babies can be safe at birth.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to thank our partners in this battle: the American people, and their government through Ambassador DeLisi, who is here with me this afternoon, to say on behalf of the government of Uganda and the people of Uganda just how grateful we are. I trust that the people of Uganda will triumph over HIV and AIDS, and I hope that together with our partners, we will celebrate that triumph someday.

Ambassador DeLisi: As we continue to launch this effort to eliminate mother-to-child transmission, my message would be, please, take advantage of the opportunity that is being offered. Take advantage of the antenatal classes and attend all of them. Take advantage of the medications that are available today that can both protect your lives, reduce the risk of future transmission, and most importantly, allow your child to begin a life free of this burden. Because we can all make a difference, but it requires all of us in a committed effort together to change this future, and I know that we can do that.